

Proclamation 4339

December 30, 1974

**March of Dimes Birth Defects Prevention Month, 1975***By the President of the United States of America***A Proclamation**

The nation's most precious resource is our children. Each year, however, about 150,000 babies born alive in this country have some kind of birth defect. In the first year of life, birth defects are a leading cause of death.

Today, more than 1,500 genetic defects have been cataloged, and new defects are being described in increasing numbers. Some of these are pre-existing defects from parent to child, some are caused by factors in the environment such as radiation exposure, drugs, chemicals and infections, while the cause of others is still unknown.

Discovery that a baby has a birth defect is devastating to parents. In some families, however, the probability that a specific birth defect will occur can be predicted with some accuracy.

Some defects can be diagnosed before, at, or shortly after birth. Almost as many are discovered during the first year of life. A few do not become evident until years later. Some defects can be corrected during the earliest months of life, but others unfortunately result in life-long handicaps and are irreversible. Some defects are severe and some are so mild that they can be overcome with specialized medical management.

Birth defects occur in families in every social, economic, racial, and educational level. The problems presented by these defects today are different than they were 10 years ago. Damage caused to an unborn infant by the German measles virus can virtually be eliminated with the use of the German measles vaccine. Further reductions in other birth defects can be made using knowledge already available. Good prenatal care from the earliest weeks of pregnancy, or, better yet, even before pregnancy, can help protect the pregnant woman and her unborn child from potential factors known to cause these tragic defects. In addition, new information about genetics and the effects of drugs taken by a

pregnant woman upon the developing child is being used to prevent these disorders.

Prevention is far better than a cure. It is very fitting, therefore, that the efforts be recognized of medical researchers and practitioners throughout the country, other health professionals, and voluntary organizations working so hard toward achieving this goal of prevention.

By joint resolution, the Congress authorized and requested that the President annually designate the month of January as March of Dimes Birth Defects Prevention Month. Only through a joint effort by government and the public it serves can we continue to improve the health of our most precious resource.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GERALD R. FORD, President of the United States of America, do hereby designate January 1975 as March of Dimes Birth Defects Prevention Month.

I invite the Governors of the States and appropriate local government officials to support March of Dimes Birth Defects Prevention Month activities and I call upon the nation's mass communications media to join in encouraging all Americans to heed the message of March of Dimes Birth Defects Prevention Month—prevention of birth defects before they occur.

I urge everyone: government officials at all levels—national, state, and local—voluntary organizations, and private groups everywhere, to give special attention to these efforts for the continuing prevention of birth defects and to helping those who are afflicted.

I urge that citizens of this country fight against birth defects and particularly emphasize to all mothers the importance of maintaining good health by seeking medical care during the childbearing years.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this thirtieth day of December, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and seventy-four, and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred and ninety-ninth.

GERALD R. FORD